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OCCUPATIONAL TESTING/CAREER GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING PROGRAMME IN MALAWI

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Introduction

At the General Conference of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) held in Geneva on 8th June 1949, the ILO made a number of recommendations with regard to vocational guidance. One of the recommendations stated:

> "During the period of general education, preliminary vocational guidance should be included within the educational programme. Such guidance should be primarily designed to make the young person aware of his aptitudes, qualifications and interests and the various occupations and careers so as to facilitate future vocational adjustment."

This recommendation stresses the need to give the individual child on opportunity for personal development and satisfaction from work, with due regard for the most effective use of national manpower resources.

From the time the ILO General Conference was held in Geneva in 1949, very little, if not nothing, was done in Malawi with regard to vocational guidance. It was not until the late sixities that some people began developing interest in career guidance. The kind of activities that took place involved the production of newsletters by the Ministry of Education in Blantyre which were distributed to all secondary schools in the country. Career talks were organised especially for those schools in industrial urban areas. Although such activities took place, very few teachers, if any, understood what career guidance was all about. Those involved in career guidance did their work by trial and error. Teachers were hand picked by their headmaster or headmistress to be career advisors to students without due regard to the individual's competence in the field.

Career guidance and counselling programme began to gather momentum in the early seventies. A conference was held at one of the secondary schools in the country in 1971 and another one was held in 1976. At both conferences, teachers from secondary schools were invited and problems about career guidance in schools were discussed; and recommendations made to the Ministry of Education and Culture. Realising the importance of guidance and counselling services in schools, the Ministry of Education and Culture established a post of Vocation Guidance Officer in 1974. The duties of the officer were to:

(a) establish and maintain contact with secondary schools and employers, and other institutions of learning.

(b) write a newsletter on careers and disseminate the information to schools in order to assist students and careers counsellors on current job opportunities, training, etc.

(c) collect data on students' career aspirations and choices and knowledge, and about information on training opportunities and analysing it.

Due to the exigencies of the service and promotions, officers in charge of career guidance and counselling have changed a few times. This has somewhat slowed down the progress of the career guidance programme in schools.

Career Guidance in Secondary Schools

Despite the difficulties mentioned above, the Ministry of Education and Culture ensures that every secondary school has a careers guidance counsellor whose job is, besides their normal teaching load to disseminate information about the various jobs available in the country and help students to prepare themselves for the world of work. The tendency now is to concentrate on school leavers and not so much on those students who are staying on. As mentioned earlier on, the Ministry of Education and Culture is faced with the problem of lack of trained personnel to successfully run the programme. Those involved in career guidance counselling are ordinary teachers with their Dip.Ed. or B.Ed but no relevant training in career guidance and counselling. Realising this lack of expertise, some teachers have been sent for post-graduate training in careers guidance and counselling with the hope of making the programme more vigorous and meaningful.

Apart from sending some teachers for training in the field of careers guidance and counselling, efforts are being made to make those teachers involved in this work become more aware of the need for guidance services in the schools through workshops. One such workshop was held in Lilongwe in August/September 1982. The workshop was jointly organized by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).

Participants to the workshop were drawn from various Ministries such as the Ministry of Education and Culture, Labour, Agriculture and the Department of Community and Social Welfare. The wide cross-section of participants was deliberate because of the nature of the services these Ministries render to the public. It is a well known fact that counselling does not end at the secondary school. Adults, too, do need counselling services.

During the workshop, participants were exposed to both theoretical and practical aspects of guidance and counselling. By the end of the workshop, participants had a clear idea of what guidance and counselling is all about. They left with confidence and ready to do the job more efficiently than before. To many the workshop was an opener and hoped that follow-up workshops will be held in order to reinforce the 1982 workshop and that it will extend to those who did not have the chance in 1982.

External voluntary organizations such as the Rotary Club of Blantyre is of great assistance in disseminating information about jobs. The Club is currently engaged in giving career talks at least once a year to schools in and around Blantyre and Lilongwe. The career talks by the Rotary Club cover such fields as Engineering, Architecture, Banking, Accountancy, Insurance and Medicine. This is an indication that the general public is just as concerned as the government is in career guidance and counselling. This interest by the employers may be the result of experiences the employers have with school leavers. The transition from school life to the world of work is not easy for the growing young man. He needs to adjust to the new environment and be aware of his capabilities and interests. He can achieve this if he is given proper guidance and relevant information about work.

Problems

One major problem apart from lack of expertise, is the implementation of the programme in schools. Up to now, guidance and counselling is not included on the school time table. Those assigned the duties of guidance and counselling have to find their own time to do the counselling. It is regarded in many cases as an extra-curricular activity. This can work very well in boarding secondary schools where pupils are readily available. But in day secondary school (which are in the majority) it is virtually impossible to get hold of students after classes. Everybody wants to go home. The careers guidance counsellor does not have the time to sit down and talk to the students and get to know them better. His job then becomes very superficial. However, we hope that careers guidance and counselling will in the near future be included on the school time table. When this is done, students will be able to get the full benefit of guidance and counselling services.

The other problem is lack of occupational information material and the proximity of industries. Those secondary schools which are in and around industrial urban areas have an advantage over the rural secondary schools. The careers guidance counsellor in industrial urban areas can collect the relevant information about the various jobs personally. He can also easily organise occupational visits at no cost at all. For those schools located far away from industrial urban areas, organising such occupational visits is very difficult because of the distances involved and lack of funds. The careers guidance counsellors in the rural secondary school have to rely on whatever little information is available, if any. In the absence of such information there is very little the guidance counsellor can do other than making some intelligent guesswork about job opportunities, job descriptions, educational requirements and training opportunities.

Coupled with the lack of occupational information material is the lack of funds. Just like any other developing country in Africa, Malawi has financial problems in effectively running most of its programmes. Schools do not have enough funds to organise occupational information libraries and occupational visits. The schools would rather spend money in purchasing the conventional educational materials. Our teachers as well as the students are so examination concious that any activity outside the prescribed curriculum is not taken very seriously.

Psychological Testing for Guidance and Counselling in Malawi

At present there are no psychological tests such as the Interest Inventories, Aptitude tests, Intelligent tests etc, being used in the schools for the individual appraisal of the students. The careers guidance counsellor relies only on the teacher-made achievement tests. The extent to which the teachers concerned make meaningful interpretations of the achievement test scores remains to be seen. It is envisaged that workshops will be held in the near future where careers guidance counsellors will be exposed to the various psychological tests that could be used for counselling. The teachers will also be trained how to administer, score and interpret the test scores. Choosing the appropriate test battery for a particular purpose is another area which will be emphasised during the workshop. Before any test is used, one must be clear about what he is looking for and choose a test that will adequately measure the required trait or behaviour.

Although psychological tests are not used for career guidance and counselling, they are used for job placement and vocational training selection both in the public and private sectors. Companies such as the Imperial Tobacco Group and the Malawi Railways, use the National Institute for Personnel Research (NIPR) tests for recruiting new employees. The Malawi Certificate Examination and Testing Board (MCETB) has a number of psychological tests which are used for selection as well as job placement. The tests range from those published by psychological Corporation, National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), NIPR tests and the Internationally Developed tests (ID-tests) developed by the American Institute for Research (AIR) in West Africa and tried out in various parts of Africa.

The Ministry of Education and Culture would like to take advantage of the existing psychological tests and try to adapt them for use in secondary schools for guidance and counselling. To do this requires trained personnel. It is hoped that those now in training will be able to do this job on their return. In the absence of psychological tests, individual student appraisal is only based on non-test techniques and school tests results, which is not very satisfactory.

University Involvement in Guidance and Counselling

Realising the need for guidance and counselling services in our secondary schools, an optional course in guidance and counselling was introduced at Chancellor College, Education Department in 1981/82 academic year to final year education students. The aim of the course is to equip the would be teachers with both theoretical and practical aspects of career guidance and counselling. The first group of 15 diploma students graduated in 1982 and are now teaching in the schools. Hopefully, they are using the knowledge they acquired at College in guidance and counselling. During the 1982/1983 academic year, 14 B.Ed students opted for the course in guidance and counselling. These have now been posted to various secondary schools in the country. The Ministry of Education and Culture was provided with a list of names of those who took the course. It is hoped that Headmasters/Headmistresses have been informed and that these teachers have been given the responsibility of being career guidance counsellors.

Guidance and counselling services are offered at the College. There is a committee the Careers Advisory Committee set up by the Principal to look into the general welfare of the students as well as assist them to secure jobs. There are no psychological tests employed. Career guidance is based on the type of course one is following.

Future Plans

The Ministry of Education and Culture is currently thinking of launching counselling programmes through the radio. Radio talks will focus on the various jobs available in the country, job analysis, educational requirements and training. From the radio talks, pamphlets will be produced and distributed to all secondary schools and the Malawi Correspondence Centres. The radio talks will be sponsored by the Rotary Club of Blantyre. There will be thirty such programmes spread over a period of seven months. The people to be involved in career talks will be those from the University of Malawi, Government Ministries, Statutory Bodies and the private sector.

The radio talk pamphlets will be translated into Chichewa, the national language, for the benefit of those who cannot read and understand English also to ensure that counselling services reach many people both in urban and rural areas.

A cassette library will be set up at the Ministry of Education and Culture Headquarters. The cassettes will be sent to schools on loan. This will assist in disseminating occupational information to all students and not only the school leavers.

A handbook on Career Guidance and Counselling has been written and is now in press. As soon as it is out, it will be distributed to all secondary schools in the country. The handbook containes information about (a) the nature of career guidance, (b) aims of career guidance, (c) duties of a career counsellor, (d) organization of careers education (e) beginning careers education (f) individual interview, (g) group activities (h) career talks (i) occupational visits (j) work experience (k) task capsule, and (l) study method capsule.

Conclusion

Although the initial stages of career guidance and counselling have been rather rough and slow, Malawi has and still is trying its best to make careers guidance and counselling services in secondary schools a reality. There is still a lot of work to be done before the programme becomes fully operational. Some of the things which are intended to be done are:

(a) Training of personnel to man the office of Careers Guidance Counsellor at the Ministry of Education and Culture.

(b) Training of secondary school teachers in the basic principles of career guidance and counselling.

(c) Training of secondary school teachers in the use of psychological tests in career guidance and counselling.

(d) Adoptation of some foreign tests for local use.

(e) Making the general public aware of the need for career guidance and counselling services in schools.

To be able to accomplish this, the Ministry of Education and Culture will have to include guidance and counselling on its budget. Funds and personnel being available, careers guidance and counselling services in Malawi promise to be a success.